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Oneida Indian Nation Artifacts on Display at Valley Forge National Historical Park

The Oneida Nation has generously lent several artifacts from its collection for display at the park's Welcome Center. These artifacts help visitors to understand that those fighting for our country's independence came from various parts of society; of different races, religions, and lands of origin.

The Oneida association with Valley Forge dates back to the winter of 1777-78 when Washington's forces were stationed at Valley Forge. In March 1778, Washington asked the 20-year-old General Lafayette to recruit Native allies in anticipation of a spring movement of the armies. Knowing that the Oneidas had long-standing ties of friendship with the French, Lafayette traveled to New York in hope that this friendship would influence the Oneida to fight for the American cause.

On May 13, 1778, 47 Oneidas arrived at Valley Forge and were placed under the command of the young general. The Oneidas were immediately assigned to a special detachment of scouts who, along with Lafayette's 500 Continental troops, were to spy on the British in Philadelphia.

On May 18th Lafayette stopped for the night, establishing camp at Barren Hill, about 12 miles from Philadelphia. Unfortunately, the British were fully aware of Lafayette's encampment and marched out of Philadelphia on the night of May 19 to encircle the American forces.

The Oneidas and their American counterparts met the front of one of the British columns sometime on the morning of May 20 and immediately engaged the British in a brief but bloody skirmish. Knowing that they were about to be surrounded, Lafayette's troops retreated, still firing and under heavy attack. The Oneidas were the last of Lafayette's troops to cross the Schuylkill River, and it was only this skirmish that alerted Lafayette to the danger of being outflanked by the British. If not for the Oneida and American scouts bravely engaging the British, nearly a fifth of the American army might have been lost.

About Valley Forge National Historical Park

Valley Forge National Historical Park is a national icon of the American Revolution that serves as a place where visitors enjoy, understand, care for, and preserve America's history and natural heritage. The Park offers an engaging, complete educational and recreational experience, providing an important piece of the American story in a beautiful, historical, preserved landscape.